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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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DATE October 29, 1983 7:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT A Week Of Military Actions

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A major dissent from House Speaker Tip O'Neill on the Grenada invasion. He says it's wrong.

George, you think the President was right in sending U.S. troops into Grenada?

GEORGE F. WILL: I do think he was right. I think American power today is more credible, and hence peace is more secure.

AGRONSKY: Marianne?

MARIANNE MEANS: I'm skeptical. I think he threw away respect for the law. He threw away freedom of the press. It didn't settle anything. If he really wanted to settle something he could blockade Cuba. It was just another move in the political game of chicken that we're playing globally, and he happened to have Grenada at hand. As Senator Mathias says, it was bite size.

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Communists must be stopped. Grenada looked like a great place to me to stop them.

AGRONSKY: Carl?

CARL ROWAN: Given to me the overwhelming evidence that Grenada was being raped by some cut-throat murderers, given what I still believe to be legitimate cries of help from inside Grenada and from other countries in the East Caribbean, I have to support this action.

AGRONSKY: Well, we'll discuss these views in a minute.

* * *

AGRONSKY: Carl set forth the reasons he thought the President was right. What are yours?

WILL: I think Carl is right. I think, first of all, there are two sufficient reasons. Either one would have done. One was the safety of the Americans on the island and the legitimate fears that you could have another Iranian hostage crisis. But I think that's less important, and certainly so, too, in my mind is -- is the reason of the appeal from the neighboring states, although that's not negligible. It's just not legally convincing.

The principal reason for doing this is that two Cubas in this hemisphere are quite sufficient -- Cuba and Nicaragua -- and that we do not need another Soviet military outpost with ports and airstrips completed for military purposes near vulnerable nations and vulnerable shipping lanes.

KILPATRICK: Plus, there's a vast quantity of oil that passes right through that pass that's between Grenada and Venezuela. I think I support it wholly on tactical and strategic grounds.

ROWAN: Well, you know, this is where I would have to walk away from you. If it were simply a case of our saying they're producing another Marxist government. We won't tolerate that. I would then fall back on my belief that we have no business trying to impose if a people want a certain government. But -- well, it was obvious to me that here was a case in the first place.

Bishop -- Maurice Bishop did not represent the will of the people. But, when they murdered Bishop, when they murdered others in the Cabinet, when they put the Governor General under house arrest, when he sneaks a message out saying, "Please intervene militarily," then I am compelled to be

concerned about it on those grounds, and not on the grounds that the U.S. is trying to determine whether somebody can have a Marxist government.

[Confusion of voices].

MEANS: Weren't there other alternatives to this? I mean, a full-scale invasion and occupation does not seem to me it was enough pursuit of alternatives. Could not the students there have been evacuated? All this seems to me like a vastly over-reaction [sic] to a situation.

AGRONSKY: May I say it's a very important issue.

Marianne, your point was made, and I think very well made by Senator Mathias of Maryland who regards the cost in having been, as he puts it, as disproportionate to the menace, and he feels very strongly that there was not an effort to undertake the political process in negotiating. Note, for example, that Maurice Bishop was here some months ago, that he met with him. Bishop had come to work out some kind of a solution in which we could -- he could work with the United States, and wherever he turned in this Capitol City, at the State Department, with presidential advisors, or whatever, he was rejected, and there was no effort to undertake some kind of a political solution in concert with him for one thing.

ROWAN: You do not have to endorse all the slurs and slams at Bishop that came from this government to understand that when Bishop, listening to his neighbors in the East Caribbean, made some motions to move back toward constitutional government, the Cubans and the Russians had him killed. And there's no doubt in my mind that this is what took place.

WILL: Well, actually....

AGRONSKY: Suppose he had been -- been in concert with the United States? Might that necessarily have happened?

ROWAN: I hope so. I think it would. I think it would have happened.

WILL: Martin, the point is, you're saying that the kind of people that the kind of people who did this -- tried to kill this man because he showed perhaps a slight desire to hedge away from the Soviets and the Cubans -- those are the people you want him to negotiate with?

What reason do you have to believe that they would negotiate?

AGRONSKY: Not negotiate with them. We could have

negotiated with Bishop, and thus in the process strengthen his hands.

WILL: The President was confronted not with Bishop, but with new crowd of killers at the beginning of this week. The question is, is this a disproportionate response to these people. And the people like Mathias who are saying, well, I don't know -- Mack is saying we ought to negotiate it -- but people are saying you ought to negotiate with them -- these are people who killed Bishop for not even negotiating.

MEANS: There is a sort of a certain lack of regard for international law here. I think the situation may be a little similar to when Lyndon Johnson sent the Marines into the Dominican Republic in 1965. But he also used the pretex that he wanted to save American lives. It was really because he didn't want this government to take over that he didn't like.

But what he did immediately, within two days, was to get the OAS to put the umbrella over it, and the OAS had some regional peacekeeping responsibilities, and give it at least a coloration of law.

And -- but even so, we were still there for a year before there was a government.

[Confusion of voices].

MEANS: Now, this Administration's made no -- no real legal case for doing that.

AGRONSKY: May I raise another point, again along the line that the Speaker has raised.

He pointed out that there is every indication that this Administration has wished to invade Grenada for at least two years. He points out that two years ago he met with Al Haig, who was then our Secretary of State, and that at that point Haig said to him, to the Speaker, that he regarded it as a very important thing for the United States to invade Grenada because of the strategic concerns that he saw.

KILPATRICK: But, Martin, my deal old friend, who had invaded Grenada first? Not the United States. Cuba.

MEANS: Wasn't it invited in legally by the Bishop government?

KILPATRICK: It amounted to an invasion of Grenada, a takeover of the country. It had all been planned.

ROWAN: You know, Martin, let me say this. It's something that would bother me. If I thought for a moment we were going to be in there forever as an occupation country, there's no way I could support this. If I thought we were going to take this as a reason for believing that you could solve all problems -- Central American, Middle East -- by a dispatch of U.S. forces, I would be terribly disturbed.

But I happen to know that Prime Minister Charles is not -- of Dominica -- is not a bad person, not a person wanting to use goon squads to stay in power. The same thing could be said for Compton in St. Lucia, the same thing for the leaders of Barbados. If these were people simply wanting to feather their own nests, I wouldn't take their plea for help to mean anything. But I find it compelling that they and the Governor General did cry out for help.

AGRONSKY: We will consider -- consider other facets of the Grenadian invasion in a minute.

* * *

AGRONSKY: Marianne, there was one segment of the American population that was not there when the invasion of Grenada came. That was American media.

The Defense Department, the White House, whoever it was, the government said you cannot be there and kept them out. Was that right?

MEANS: Well, no, it was not right, and it was also a mistake, I think, politically, because it was all right that they lied to the press about the fact that there was not going to be an invasion, and they obviously needed secrecy for that. But two-and-a-half days later, they still had not allowed any independent press into the country to cover the events, and I think that this is prior censorship. What they were really up to was they did not want any pictures of the fighting before the President had a chance to go on television and wrap himself in the flag and get support for this invasion. And that is using us for their political purposes. It goes to the heart of the credibility of the President as he tries to explain and as events go on and he argues with Congress about the legality of it, and so forth. And I think it will prove in the long run to have been a terrible mistake for him.

KILPATRICK: We see it that way, those of us in the press. I'm not at all certain that out in the country as a whole people are going to view this as a credibility on the part of the President, that for two days he did not let the media in.

I'm on your side. I think it was a bad mistake to have kept the press out. It brought things down on Mr. Reagan that he really didn't need.

But I don't know if there's that much sympathy in the country as a whole for the press, and the press brought some of this on itself from the time of the "Pentagon Papers". This adversarial relationship between the media and the White House almost invites this skind of treatment.

MEANS: Well, that point is true, but I think Vietnam was much more of a problem. I was talking to a military officer just yesterday, and he said, you know, the military thinks that the press was part of the problem in Vietnam, and the reporting was awful, and we didn't want you there.

AGRONSKY: Right.

ROWAN: Well, I'll tell you this, in terms of credibility in this country, but especially in the world, they may wind up wishing the press were there. They sure make it hard for you to support them. I mean, I search my conscience and go along to back them, but I don't want to have to take the military's word totally for what they find in this so-called Cuban cache. If they tell me they found all these arms and all this stuff that they can give the subversives, I'd love to have had some newspaper man there to see it, too, and this is important in the world.

WILL: Let's keep this in perspective. On the day that a great many editors were going on about what they somewhat hyperbolically called "a secret war," there were five stories about that war on the front pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post. Even....

AGRONSKY: What are you talking about, George, the Grenada invasion?

WILL: Yeah. Correct.

MEANS: Oh, but they were based on unreliable -- on ham operators, things that couldn't be checked.

[Confusion of voices].

WILL: To compare this -- the conduct of war in the press in the 70s -- 60s, 70s and 80s -- let's say the 40s, or even in -- in World War I, I'm told -- I've seen it reliably reported, I cannot confirm it, but I think it's true that during the entire First World War the French, German and British press not once carried a picture of a dead soldier.

Life magazine -- I believe it was late 1943, perhaps 1944 -- ran a famous picture with a dead American soldier on the beach in New Guinea. It was one of the first pictures of a dead American soldier that late into the war, and it was held up for months by the Pentagon.

Compared to the way the press has operated in the past, this is a libertarian regime.

AGRONSKY: Oh, George, I just....

[Confusion of voices].

MEANS: We don't want to romanticize war. That's --that....

AGRONSKY: Soldiers get killed in wars. I would think it is terribly important that when American soldiers are killed....

WILL: That is....

AGRONSKY: ...In this country, we are able to say what is happening.

WILL: That is an....

AGRONSKY: If there was a bad reaction -- well, George, you're going to have to be patient a second -- if there was a bad reaction in this country to the Vietnam war being fought, if you like, on the tube in the United States and the military didn't like it, so be it. Let them not like it. I think it was an important contribution by the press.

WILL: That is an interesting point, but another point. You're not addressing the point that I made.

AGRONSKY: I'm not addressing the point that you made.

WILL: The point is that the press has simply operated in the past -- in World War I and II, and probably in Korea --in restraints more onerous than any operating in the 70s or 80s.

ROWAN: Well, let me say this, George. We've never had a situation that I know of where they say to the press you can go into the battle area and use the cockamamie excuse that it's dangerous for newspaper men. Newspaper men take a job with a willingness to face danger the same way soldiers do.

WILL: I know.

ROWAN: Now, beyond that, it is sure not a libertarian regime. I understood not just because of this, but because of a whole pattern of efforts to say they want to close off the flow of information.

WILL: Here is something maybe we could agree on. I would like to see said that the first journalists sent overseas in days like these should be those people who put cameras in the faces of parents who are grief-stricken after learning that their children have been killed.

KILPATRICK: Here, here.

MEANS: That's different.

AGRONSKY: It's bad taste, of which I agree. Good enough, George, but that's got nothing to do with what we're talking about.

KILPATRICK: Let me return to the point I was trying to make. The Washington Post's editorial on censoring the invasion wound up with charging the Administration with a face of arrogance. I think sometimes we in the press ought to let that arrogance be spread around a little bit, because we in the press sometimes have been just a little tad arrogant ourselves.

AGRONSKY: Well, I -- I can't say [word unintelligible] on this one. I think we should have been in there, and I think it's wrong that we weren't.

KILPATRICK: I agree on that point.

AGRONSKY: All right. Fair enough.

Now, there's one other aspect that we -- that I think we should touch on, and that is the reaction of our allies of what we did in Grenada, and we'll address that in a minute.

* * *

AGRONSKY: Because the American involvement in Grenada doesn't occur in a vacuum, the West German government, one of our strongest allies, said that we should get out of there as quickly as we can. The Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mrs. Thatcher, indicated that in a preliminary talk with the President she urged him not to undertake it at all. She hasn't said he was wrong, but certainly the Labour -- the opposition against Mrs. Thatcher in Parliament has said so.

Now what is the impact of this, do you think, on our allies?

ROWAN: Well, I think the most serious question is what will it have to do with West Germany's willingness to accept Pershing II missiles in December? The West Germans have said this creates a severe problem for them, and I expect we're going to see some pretty strong demonstrations before then.

You've got people in Britain saying this proves this man is reckless. How can we let him put any missiles here and have his finger at the button, et cetera. There's going to be more of that.

But, we'll see.

MEANS: Well, in the heightened rhetoric, the President, in his speech, tying the Soviet Union with Cuba and with Korea, and with all the things and so forth, cannot improve East-West relations. And this happens to come at a time when, for instance, Andropov has put forward a new peace plan which so far we're not paying any attention to but which sounds as though he is making some concessions. He said he would freeze the missiles in the Asian section of the country, which he's not said before. He said that he would reduce the numbers of the SS-20s in Europe, which he has -- further than he'd said before. And this could fall -- the arms talks could fall victim to this. So, as you say, this has not happened in a vacuum.

AGRONSKY: Yeah.

KILPATRICK: Carl mentioned that all these people in Britain are rushing around saying Reagan is a warmonger, you know, and sabre rattling. But what about all the people in the United States, these women that we hear about, mothers? What's the political fallout from this?

My own feeling is that if we get these Marines in and out of Grenada in a hurry, after that magnificent speech the President made the other night, it probably will be a political plus.

MEANS: Well, to the degree....

AGRONSKY: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

MEANS: Excuse me. To the degree that it increases the image of Reagan as a warmonger, which has haunted him all his political career, which he's begun to kind of shuck off, and his restrained reaction to the downing of Flight 007, and so forth, I think it could possibly hurt him. For instance, the gender gap is based at least in part on female objections to this view of Reagan as a man just too willing to use military might to answer political problems.

AGRONSKY: Marianne, you've made point. I won't try to pursue it any further.

I would like to raise the other question which of great significance. The President has committed himself flatly now to keeping the Marines in Lebanon despite that devastating incident with the bombing of our headquarters in Beirut. And Vice President Bush was over there and reiterated that.

Now, this commitment to stay in Lebanon -- do you think that reflects a congressional concensus, a national concensus, George?

WILL: Not yet on either. But I think it's right anyway. You can't conduct foreign policy by Gallup Poll or by polling the country.

AGRONSKY: I didn't suggest you could.

WILL: I didn't suggest that you did suggest that I could. But I would -- I do think that it's important that we understand what Jim Schlesinger was saying -- former Secretary of Defense -- when he said, among other things, in Lebanon they've turned Eisenhower on his head.

Eisenhower, in 1958, sent in substantial forces against token opposition. We have token forces and substantial threats over there. We need -- still need a clear definition of a mission and more support.

ROWAN: Martin, let me say that if politics is the art of the possible, so is the projection of military power. Projecting the Marines, the Rangers into the Caribbean was the possible. Keeping those Marines in Beirut under the circumstances we've had them on would be impossible. Everybody in the world knows I've sat here for weeks saying we ought to pull them out, that it was a tragedy waiting to happen. I still think they ought to be pulled out, and I think with a decent passage of time they will be pulled back while we come up with another game plan.

KILPATRICK: I -- I think you're probably wrong. Marianne and I were at a briefing at the White House just a couple of days ago, and a senior Administration official suggested to us that the Marines could be there quite a long time. They may be engaged in some kind of public relations capacity. He kept speaking of a presence. The people there feel more comfortable, he said, when there are a few United States Marines around.

ROWAN: I would like to have the Marines feel comfortable, too.

MEANS: Well, we are there as a peacekeeping force, and I don't think that the progress that has been made -- admittedly, it isn't great -- would have been possible without them there kind of calming things down and allowing the talks to go ahead. They are finally beginning to talk, and we have to stay there and allow that process to continue. A political solution is a lot better than a military one, and that's what would happen if we pulled out.

AGRONSKY: Yes. I -- I would disagree with you on pulling our people out.

ROWAN: I know you have for weeks and weeks, but I think I'm right.

AGRONSKY: Well, you may think you're right. You --you -- do you accept any of the argument that there is a vital American interest involved in the entire area and that this is a symbol of our willingness to undertake it?

ROWAN: I know there's a vital interest, but we're talking about pragmatism and practicality here. We have asked sixteen hundred Marines to keep a peace that doesn't exist, to pacify people who won't be pacified, and to do what they can't do today and won't be able to do tomorrow.

AGRONSKY: And if there were 16,000?

ROWAN: They still wouldn't be able to do it.

KILPATRICK: The symbolism doesn't matter to you of the Marines' presence?

ROWAN: Not symbolism worth getting a bunch of people killed.

AGRONSKY: Well that's the last word, Carl.

Thank you, Marianne, gentlemen.